

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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R 030950Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7497

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY DACCA

S E C R E T NEW DELHI 11320

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:PFOR PINS IN PK AF

SUBJECT: REGIONAL SECURITY BALANCE IN SOUTH ASIA

1. AFTER 25 YEARS AND TESTING IN FOUR WARS, THE BALANCE OF MILITARY POWER IN SOUTH ASIA APPEARS BOTH CLEAR, STABLE AND UNLIKELY TO CHANGE IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. PAKISTAN HAS TESTED ITSELF AGAINST INDIA REPEATEDLY AND FOUND IT CANNOT SUSTAIN A CONFLICT OF MORE THAN A FEW WEEKS OR SERIOUSLY INJURE OR THREATEN THE STABILITY OF ITS FAR LARGER EASTERN NEIGHBOR. INDIA CONCEIVABLY COULD OVER-RUN PAKISTAN BUT WOULD PROBABLY STRANGLE IN AN EFFORT TO OCCUPY AND ABSORB IT AND CONCEIVABLY TEAR ITSELF APART THROUGH RENEWED COMMUNAL CONFLICT. THE CHINESE AND INDIANS FOUGHT A SERIES OF SKIRMISHES IN 1962 WHICH REVEALED THE LIMITATIONS OF INDIAN MILITARY STRENGTH AT THAT TIME (SINCE SUBSTANTIALLY REMEDIED) AS WELL AS THE RESTRAINTS ON THE CHINESE IN ATTEMPTING TO EXTEND THEIR AUTHORITY SOUTH OF THE HIMALAYAS. BANGLADESH IS A MILITARILY HELPLESS STATE WHOSE ONLY REAL DEFENSE IS THE GARGANTUAN TASK POSED TO ANY INVADER IN OCCUPYING AND EFFECTIVELY GOVERNING IT.

2. PAKISTAN'S ABILITY TO HOLD BACK OR INDEED DEFEAT

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ANY POTENTIAL THREAT FROM AFGHANISTAN IS BEYOND

DOUBT AND, DESPITE THE UPDATING BY SOME PAKISTANI OFFICIALS OF THE 19TH CENTURY, BRITISH CONCERN OVER SOVIET PENETRATION THROUGH THE INDUS VALLEY DOWN TO THE INDIAN OCEAN, THERE SEEMS LITTLE EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT SUCH CONCERN -- AT LEAST THROUGH OVERT SOVIET MILITARY AGGRESSION.

3. NEPAL, BHUTAN AND SRI LANKA ARE, FOR ALL EFFECTIVE PURPOSES, CIPHERS SIGNIFICANT LARGELY BECAUSE THEY SEPARATE INDIA FROM CHINA AND DO NOT PROVIDE BASES FOR ANY STATE POTENTIALLY HOSTILE TO ANY OTHER STATE IN THE REGION.

4. NEVERTHELESS THE LAST 12 MONTHS HAVE FOUND VIRTUALLY EVERY COUNTRY IN THE REGION ANXIOUSLY LOOKING AROUND TO PROCURE WEAPONS OR WEAPON SYSTEMS TO "STRENGTHEN" ITS SECURITY. INDIA, ALREADY STRONGER MILITARILY THAN ALL ITS NEIGHBORS COMBINED, IS ENLARGING AND MODERNIZING ITS NAVY, ITS AIR FORCE, ITS AIR DEFENSE SYSTEM, AND ITS GROUND FORCES. NEPAL IS LOOKING AROUND -- PERHAPS TO CHINA -- FOR AN ALTERNATIVE TO INDIA FOR AT LEAST SOME DEFENSE EQUIPMENT. BANGLADESH, POVERTY STRICKEN AND UNABLE TO PAY, IS LOOKING FOR GIFT OR CREDIT ARMS FROM THE US, CHINA, OR ANYONE IN WESTERN EUROPE OR THE MIDEAST WILLING TO LISTEN. PAKISTAN IS SEEKING A WIDE RANGE OF MODERN WEAPONS FROM THE US AND EUROPEAN SUPPLIERS AS WELL AS CHINA AND NORTH KOREA.

5. IF THERE WAS EVER A REGION WHICH WAS READY FOR SOME SORT OF ARMS STABILIZATION AND RESTRAINT AGREEMENT, IT WOULD APPEAR TO BE SOUTH ASIA. THERE ISN'T A COUNTRY IN THE REGION THAT CAN REALLY AFFORD THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT IT MAINTAINS, MUCH LESS BUY INTO INCREASINGLY EXPENSIVE MODERN EQUIPMENT. AND WITH THE MOVES TOWARD NORMALIZATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIA AND CHINA, INDIA AND PAKISTAN AND PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS, EVEN THE POLITICAL (AS OPPOSED TO STRATEGIC)

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MOTIVATION TO STRENGTHEN THEIR RESPECTIVE ESTABLISHMENTS WOULD SEEM TO BE WEAKENING.

6. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, THE CAREFULLY RESTRAINED US ARMS SALES POLICY TOWARD THIS AREA SEEMS TO US TO HAVE BEEN ABSOLUTELY RIGHT IN THE LAST FEW YEARS AND TO BE WORTH CONTINUING AND STRENGTHENING. WE RECOGNIZE THAT PROCUREMENT BY INDIA OF NEW AND

MORE SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS EXERTS STRONG DOMESTIC
POLITICAL PRESSURES WITHIN PAKISTAN TO DO THE
SAME, EVEN IF THE STRATEGIC BALANCE IS REALLY NOT
AFFECTED ONE WAY OR THE OTHER BY THE PURCHASES
ON EITHER SIDE. AND WE UNDERSTAND THE INTERNAL
POLITICAL PRESSURES WITHIN BANGLADESH FOR SOME
MINIMAL CAPABILITY TO DEFEND ITSELF, EVEN IF THE
MOST FAR-FETCHED AND EXHORBITANT ACCUMULATION OF
ARMS BY THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH WOULD
NOT SIGNIFICANTLY ALTER THE CAPABILITY OF INDIA
TO OVERWHELM BANGLADESH IN ANY DIRECT CONFRONTATION.

7. BUT RATHER THAN JOINING IN TO
CONTRIBUTE TOWARD WEAPONS SALES, IT SEEMS TO US
THAT WE SHOULD BE THINKING ABOUT WAYS OF PERSUADING
THE COUNTRIES IN THE REGION TO CUT BACK AND REDUCE EVEN
THE LEVELS OF PURCHASES THEY HAVE BEEN MAKING. WE
ARGUE THIS NOT OUT OF SOME ABSTRACT MORAL LACK OF
SYMPATHY WITH SALES OF WEAPONS BY THE US, BUT BECAUSE
OUR BASIC OBJECTIVE IN THIS AREA OF THE WORLD
IS STABILITY AND WE DOUBT THAT WEAPONS SALES IN
THE PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES WILL CONTRIBUTE TO THIS.
THE INDIANS ARE ALREADY STRONG ENOUGH TO
OVER-RUN ALL THEIR NEIGHBORS. ANY STRENGTHENING
OF THEIR NEIGHBORS' ARMED FORCES WILL PRODUCE AN
INDIAN COUNTER-MOVE TO BUILD UP ITS PREVIOUS
LEVEL OF BALANCE. WE CAN ARGUE THAT THIS IS WRONG
FOR THE INDIANS, AND INDEED THIS EMBASSY THINKS IT
IS ABSURD. BUT, US ARMS SALES, OTHER THAN IN
RELATIVELY SMALL QUANTITIES AND OF NON-STRATEGIC CHARACTER,
MAY INTENSIFY POLITICAL SUSPICIONS AND TENSIONS
WITHOUT REALLY EFFECTING MILITARY BALANCES SINCE
THE SOVIETS WILL CONTINUE TO BE PREPARED TO

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: NATIONAL SECURITY, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, BALANCE OF POWER
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: saccheem
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976NEWDE11320
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760298-1092
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760892/aaaaddav.tel
Line Count: 156
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: saccheem
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <07 JUN 2004 by ElyME>; APPROVED <04 OCT 2004 by saccheem>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: REGIONAL SECURITY BALANCE IN SOUTH ASIA
TAGS: PFOR, PINS, IN, PK, XC
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006